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ABSTRACT

Part of a project of the small college interest group of the Central States Speech Association investigating problems of speech departments in small colleges, this paper reviews the findings of two workshops conducted by the Association of American Colleges and the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education on problems of black students in predominantly white institutions. The paper discusses typical areas of frustration for black students in these settings, steps that faculty could take in trying to become positive agents for change, and methods for initiating programs of this kind. The paper also describes efforts by a college to deal with these problems, including having special programs in the office of admissions, a task force set up by the president of the institution, and a special office for black students in the office of student affairs. (EL)

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Abstract: Recruitment and Retention of Minority Students in Small Colleges
A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association
Indianapolis, IN April 1985
William W. Neher, Butler University

This paper is part of a project of the small colleges interest group of the Central States Speech Association investigating unique characteristics or problems of departments of speech in small colleges. The paper reviews the findings of workshop conducted by the Association of American Colleges and FIPSE on problems related to black students in predominantly white institutions and then presents a case study of attempts at the author's school to deal with these problems.

These efforts include special programs in the Office of Admissions, a task force set up by the President of the institution, and a special office under the office of student affairs. The author notes the special role of teachers of communication in helping institutions deal with this subject.

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Recruitment and Retention of Minority Students in Small Colleges
A Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association, Indianapolis, Indiana April 1985.
William W. Neher, Butler University

This paper is part of the continuing study of the functions and problems distinctive to small colleges and universities that can have impact on the programs in speech communication at such schools. This program is concerned with features of the environments of smaller institutions--specifically problems or programs related to minorities and women.

This paper reports on the experience of one small, private university in the midwest and on its efforts to develop programs specifically concerned with the recruitment and retention of minority students. This school is not necessarily a model for such programs--nor is it intended to be. Rather it is intended to be case study felt to be typical of a small college trying, with mixed success, to deal with these issues.

The university is a small institution--2600 FTE students (2200 full-time day students living mostly in campus housing facilities, many of them fraternities and sororities). The university has five colleges and a university college, which provides the core curriculum required of all undergraduates before they declare a major and enter either the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Education, Business Administration, Pharmacy, or Fine Arts. The fulltime faculty of approximately 150 are predominantly white; about half are in the liberal arts college. The university was founded before the Civil War as a church-related, antislavery liberal arts school. The other

colleges have been added over time. Most undergraduates are from the Midwest, a majority from Indiana, and are about 93% white.

Before presenting some of the specific programs of this school, I will briefly try to provide some context for the nature of the usual problems of small colleges, historically or predominantly white, trying to increase sensitivity to problems of minority students. For our own discipline of speech communication, it is interesting to note how many of the problems dealt with are in the main communication problems, often covered in our own literature in the areas of intercultural and interracial communication.

The Association of American Colleges (AAC) and the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) held two workshops in 1983 and 1984 dealing with the special problems represented by white (or nearly all-white faculties) typical of AAC schools teaching black students. The study White Faculty, Black Students: Exploring Assumptions and Practices resulted from these workshops (published by AAC and FIPSE, Washington D.C., 1984).

The first workshop explored the nature of the problem for predominantly white faculty members, while the second in the series reports on seven programs that had been conducted on the campuses of schools participating in the two workshops.

Faculty from these seven institutions had attempted to develop programs to create awareness of the problems, potential or real, in the communications between the white faculty members and black students. The purpose of these programs was to improve Black-White interaction in the classroom--and to help Black students learn more in that environment. Most of the schools involved were small

institutions, private or church-related, although some larger state schools and community schools were included.

First, the workshops attempted to identify typical areas of frustration for black students in these settings:

1. "Feelings of alientation and lack of acceptance," including feelings of being ignored, lack of eye contact, interruptions of black students who were reciting or speaking in class, or not acknowledging statements by black students.

2. Lack of positive references to blacks, or to their culture, or to their contributions to the discipline.

3. Lack of black role models among the faculty or administration.

4. "Subtle as well as overt challenges to the competence of black students . . .," including such questions as "Where did you ever get such an idea?"

5. Difficulty in being accepted as an individual by many white students, shown in exclustion from study groups, for example.

These frustrations do not sound too different from those reported a decade earlier in the study of New York colleges, Black Students at White Colleges, by Charles Wille and Arline Sakuma McCord (New York, Praeger, 1972). Willie and McCord found that black students tended to feel isolated, with few social contacts (fewer than they had expected). Several of the students interviewed for this study reported that if a predominantly white school intended to recruite minority students, it should be ready to recruit a large number (defined as a few hundred) to prevent such a feeling of isolation. Also, financial aid would need to be sufficient for an increased number of students with substantial financial need. This study found that black students

often participated in programs to help recruit minority students, not out of school loyalty, the students themselves reported, by in order to overcome the problem they perceived of too few blak students on their campuses.

In responding to these frustrations resulting from classroom dynamics, the participants in the workshops suggested that faculty could take several steps in trying to become positive agents for change: establish an accepting climate in the classroom (for an elementary example, begin calling students by their names); become more aware of stereotyping; examiane their own physical behavior, or non-verbal communication, course content, and lectures; add material about blacks, their accomplishments and roles in society.

At the second of the two AAC workshops, faculty from seven institutions reported their attempts to initiate specific programs to improve the climate on their campuses. These attempts met with varying success. Interestingly, those from small campuses, where people could be more easily mobilized and addressed invidually, reported more success than those from larger institutions in getting programs started. On the other hand, those from the small schools usually found that their problems were more deep-seated or systemic than was the case for larger schools. (These reports are available in the publications mentioned above from AAC-FIPSE).

In summary of these various efforts, the following methods for initiating programs of this sort were found to be useful in many settings:

1. Interview students in class--does this class prepare one to live in a multiracial society?

2. Interview other faculty members about their experiences.

3. Talk with black students concerning their perceptions of the climate in class and on campus.

4. Hold discussions with colleagues regarding the results of these interviews.

5. Arrange for visits by faculty to each others' classrooms (only where mutually desired) for suggestions and support.

6. Discuss the dymanics in the classroom in the class.

7. Hold curriculum workshops.

8. Hold workshops concerned with either curricular materials or with classroom dynamics or interaction.

9. Develop institutional programs, such as cultural programs.

10. Use outside consultants or facilitators.

Participants reported that several guidelines suggested themselves as a result of their varied experiences in initiating such programs:

Be specific concerning goals and methods (and be realistic).

Enlist the support and participation of faculty leaders.

Consult with black students.

Consult with black faculty and administrators.

Involve faculty in planning.

Obtain the support of top-level administration.

Plan follow-up sessions and evaluations.

In reviewing these suggestions, it is clear that the university in our case study has not systematically met all the guidelines. Nonetheless, its approach is no doubt typical. First, a task force under the Vice President for Student Services was set up to study the nature and extent of any problems. This action reflects a continuing concern on the part of the President of this institution to

improve the campus climate for minority students. Second, an office of minority affairs, with a full-time director has been instituted. In addition, the Office of Admissions was already in the process of adding an Associate Director especially concerned with recruiting minority students.

It is logical to begin with the recruitment efforts and then to consider the programs for retention being intiated by the minority affairs office.

The Office of Admissions, specifically the new Associate Director, discovered that the University did not have an accurate way of counting minority students among applicants, new freshmen, or enrolled students. The method employed for determining this populations depended upon students filling our optional sections of registration cards. The Associate Director, himself a black man, proposed that he or a designee sit in the registration area and encourage all minority students to fill out these optional portions. He also worked closely with the Office of Registration and Records to help identify and determine the number of black students in the undergraduate population. On the basis of his efforts, we have been able to determine that during the last two complete academic years, the black student population was about 7%, while the total minority student population (including American Indiana, Asian, and Hispanic) was about 9%. As nearly as he can estimate, these figures represent an increase from approximately 4% black and other minority in the late 1970's.

The Office of Admissions has initiated efforts in four specific areas to increase minority student enrollment:

1. The Associate Director, responsible for minority students,

has made an effort to become more visible in those secondary schools in the university's recruiting region with substantial minority student enrollments.

2. The University participates in the National Scholarship Society and Fund for Negro Students and sends representatives to their college fairs in Detroit and Chicago.

3. The Admissions Office subscribes to the College Board search service, specifically searching for minority students with criterion predictor scores in the Midwest.

4. The office is active in community sponsored programs, such as the annual "Black Expo," and certain high school programs that are concerned with opportunities for minorities.

The task force report led to the creation of a position in student services concerned with programming for minority students after they have become enrolled in the university. This office has sponsored the following programs in its first full academic year of operations:

1. A "Mentor Program," in which senior (white) faculty members are matched with incoming minority students for guidance and support. Currently there are 22 mentors serving 25 students in the current freshman class. The purpose of the mentors is to provide the students with an informal contact with faculty members who can help the students deal with problems they may have interacting with the academic bureaucracy, or with study-related problems, grade problems, and the like. Studies on our campus and at Indiana University have indicated that informal contacts outside the classroom can be an important factor in persistence for the student.

2. This year the office is sponsoring a film festival in

February and March, focussing on Black History Month. This program is part of an effort to increase black cultural awareness among minority students, as well as white faculty and students. Of course, the festival is also intended to provide social fellowship and contacts for students.

3. The office sponsors a guest speaker program, which has already brough Dick Gregory to campus (in January). This speakers program is to be expanded next academic year. A speakers program, incidentally, should be supported by the faculty in speech communication as a natural extension of classroom material. On our campus, all freshmen are required to take introductory public speaking and rhetorical analysis; these students are required to attend and report on on-campus speeches.

4. The director of minority affairs does intend to sponsor a black student union on campus next year to provide social events and activities for the black students.

5. The director and minority students are very active in the annual meetings and programs of the Indiana Black Student Conference. This organization provides excellent opportunities for pooling information, suggestions, and experiences with various methods for enhancing black-white communication on campuses.

6. Other programs have been less formally structured and have included racial awareness sessions (unfortunately often stemming from negative episodes on campus), and informal workshops in dorms.

Finally, it must be emphasized that concern for these students cannot remain or even be perceived as the special province of only these specific offices. Obviously, such a myopia would fail to meet the real and long-term needs of all students. The question that must

be faced is the first one raised above for classroom discussion--Does this school prepare all students to live in a multiracial society. The answer to that question must be the concern of all those responsible for education at the college, not just the responsible of a few administrators. It may be too easy for faculty and others at a predominantly white institution to congratulate themselves that the problem is solved by the presence of minority officers in the admissions and student services offices.

Briefly, I should point out that it may well be the special interest of faculty in speech communication, especially when they teach nearly the entire student body in a required course, to deal with questions relating to intercultural and interracial communication. Questions for class discussion suggested above from the AAC conference would be appropriate for the discussion of communication settings in public speaking and interpersonal communication courses.

Later this month, faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will begin discussion based on the workshop ideas developed in the AAC and FIPSE conferences mentioned earlier in this paper. Possibly from these discussions will develop an effort to enlist faculty support for efforts more widely-reaching to deal with the issue of black students in a small white college.

Sources

White Faculty, Black Students: Exploring Assumptions and Practices. AAC and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. Washington, D.C., 1984.

Willie, Charles and Arline Sakuma McCord. Black Students at White Colleges. New York: Prager, 1972.